DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 300 746 CG 021 242

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TITLE Co-Mentoring: A Career Development Alternative to the Conventional Mentoring Relationship.
PUB DATE May 87
NOTE 31p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Interpersonal Relationship; *Interprofessional Relationship; *Mentors; Modeling (Psychology); *Peer Relationship

ABSTRACT

Definitions of exactly what and who constitutes a mentor are almost as numerous as the writers who have researched the subject. Being a mentor may mean being a counselor, host, guide, teacher, developer of skills and intellect, and exemplar. Co-mentoring can offer a valuable alternative to conventional mentoring relationships that are either unavailable or inappropriate for some individuals. Co-mentoring is an intense mutual mentoring relationship that is common among peers but transcends age, rank, and organizational level boundaries. A seven-step model for establishing a co-mentor relationship includes these steps: (1) values clarification; (2) analysis of personal contributions to the relationship; (3) analysis of expectations; (4) information-gathering; (5) establishment of guidelines for selection; (6) choice of co-mentor; and (7) initiation of relationship. Within the context of mutual interaction, co-mentoring relationships can provide the intense, on-going personal and professional support key to a successful mentoring relationship. (ABL)

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CO-MENTORING:

A Career Development Alternative to the Conventional Mentoring Relationship

A Study Prepared by

John W. Mosser

and

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INTRODUCTION

The role of mentoring relationships in the personal and career success of young professionals is one of ongoing interest and investigation in the United States. Not a concept new in academic or corporate environments, the virtues of having or being a mentor have been a popular focus of research and discussion. The origins of mentorship can be traced to Greek mythology in the story, The Odyssey. In the story, a character named "Mentor" is given the responsibility to watch over a younger character, Telemachus, while his father is off on a ten year journey. During the subsequent years, Mentor advises Telemachus, and develops a surrogate father and advisory role to the boy. From this relationship the concept of conventional mentorship has evolved.

Definitions of exactly what and who constitutes a mentor are almost as numerous as the writers who have researched the subject. Many adult development, corporate, and academic theorists have described mentoring relationships and its characteristics in a variety of ways, dependent upon each authors particular setting and scope of research. The most extensive work from adult development has come from Levinson et al.,(1978). Based on interviews with 40 men, Levinson's concept of a mentor includes being a counselor, host, guide, teacher, developer of skills and intellect, and exemplar. Additionally, "the mentor has another function," Levinson writes, "and this is developmentally the most crucial one: to support and facilitate the realization of the Dream" (p. 98), that is, the hopes and aspiration each young person holds for their future.

T.J. Halatin describes a mentor as "a very special person in an individual's career development program" (1981, p.35). The mentor provides discipline, guidance, advice, and feels some personal responsibility for assisting the career goals of the protege.

"Conventional mentors", Linda Phillips-Jones writes "are influential people who significantly help you reach your major life goals. They are individuals that have the power - through who or what they know - to promote your welfare, training and career" (1982, p.21).

Underlying this variety of definitions of conventional mentors "comes the sense of mentoring as a powerful emotional interaction between an older and younger person, a relationship in which the older member is trusted, loving, and experienced in the guidance of the younger. The mentor helps shape the growth and development of the protege" (Merriam, 1983, p.169). Agnes Missirian, author of The Corporate Connection, describes the key elements of the process of mentoring to be power, identification, and love. Power, being the ability to access resources of all kinds; identification, indicating the degree to which the protege accepts the mentor's professional and personal values and behavior; and love, meaning the intensity of the emotional involvement between the mentor and protege (1982, p.90).

The beneficiary of this guidance, nurturing and special attention is typically referred to as the "protege." The word "protege" is taken from the French verb, proteger,"to protect," and is used to denote both men and women who are helped to reach their career and life goals by mentors (Phillips-Jones, 1982). Proteges are not considered passive receivers of attention and assistance, but active and contributing members of an intensive two-way relationship that can be beneficial and worthwhile to each party.

The advantages of taking part in a mentoring relationship are numerous - dependent on your role as the mentor or the protege.

Advantages of Being a Mentor

Being a mentor means more than giving, helping, assisting, or developing. In this special relationship of mutual benefits and rewards, there are advantages to accepting this role, both on professional and personal levels.

The mentor has the ability to get more work done when assisted by an attentive and enthusiastic protege. They have the opportunity to develop a dependable "crucial subordinate," someone who can be a testimonial of the mentor's dedication to the organization. Mentors can receive psychological support, not only from an appreciative protege, but from colleagues who recognize and respect their contributions in developing new talent in the organization. In this way, the organization itself or individual members can reward mentors for spotting and developing new talent (Phillips-Jones, 1982). Additionally, there are personal rewards for such interactions. Mentors can find internal satisfaction in enabling a young colleague to navigate in the organizational world (Kram & Isabella, 1985). Now viewed as a possessor of great organizational power and wisdom, mentorship allows individuals to pass on "keys of the kingdom" to the next generation of organizational leaders. They can feel a part of what is to come, and leave their mark on an organization's future.

Advantages of being a Protege

The role of the protege in a mentoring relationship has an impressive list of advantages as well. Mentors provide advice to a protege on career goals and on how to navigate through the system in order to those goals. Mentors can be cheerleaders to the protege for a job well done, and give constructive criticism to avoid mistakes in the future. Proteges are privy to new skills and knowledge that were once unavailable. After finding a mentor, one's opportunities and resources would be expected to broaden to a great degree. The

increased exposure afforded by such relationships allow other key organizational mentors to learn your strengths, and therefore open new avenues of experience and interaction. Mentors are selected for qualities that a protege respects or chooses to emulate. Therefore, this newly afforded availability of a role model can be a great advantage to the less experienced protege (Phillips-Jones, 1982). The "study" of a colleague's exceptional communication skills, managerial techniques, or leadership style over an extended period of time is a good opportunity to personally develop the protege's skills. Exposure to top notch organizational people, be they older and experienced or younger and enthusiastic, can facilitate your entrance into their esteemed ranks.

The advantages of being part of a mentoring relationship go beyond those discussed here. Feelings of self-determination and increased competence with ones work and respect from colleagues can make the work experience more satisfying and tolerable during the rough times. Knowing that you have support for who you are and also for what you can offer is a strong incentive to set goals high and increase productivity to achieve them. It appears from research that the existence of a successful mentoring or co-mentoring relationship can positively affect personal and career development for each person involved.

Why is Mentorship Important?

Kram and Isabella succinctly articulate the value of the mentoring relationship as follows:

> Mentors provide young adults with career-enhancing functions, such as sponsorship, coaching, facilitating exposure and visibility, and offering challenging work or protection, all of which help the younger person to establish a role in the organization, learn the ropes, and prepare for advancement. In the psychosocial sphere, the mentor offers role modeling, counseling, confirmation, and friendship, which help the young adult to develop a sense of professional identity and competence (1985, p.111).

They point out that the reason a mentoring relationship is vital and significant is because both individuals, the mentor and protege, benefit. The protege benefits through the professional and personal affirmation and advisement. The mentor benefits through being able to teach, nurture, develop talents, and the attention and admiration of the protege.

Special issues of mentoring for women has been the focus of numerous authors (Kanter, 1977; Shapiro et al., 1978). Kanter refers to mentors as "rabbis" or "godfathers." In addition to the advice function, mentors provide three functions which generate power for a protege.

1. Sponsors can fight for the protege.
2. Sponsors can help the protege to bypass the hierarchy, or cut red tape.
3. Sponsors provide reflected power to the protege. (Kanter, 1977)

Thus, mentoring can potentially afford men and women alike personal and professional career boosts.

DISADVANTAGES OF MENTOR RELATIONSHIP

Conventional mentoring, while offering a wealth of positive advantages, does have some possible drawbacks or disadvantages. A few of these disadvantages are as follows;

1. Jealousy by co-workers or spouses of a protege can be a real problem. Perceived special or preferential treatment for one worker in an office can cause resentment and a difficult work environment for a protege.
2. Sexual Involvement - The possibility for sexual involvement can be a side effect to the mentor-protege relationship, especially because of the intensity of a conventional mentoring relationship. This would be a problem when a mentor would use his/her influence to force a protege into a sexual relationship. A related problem would result when others perceive a mentor and protege to be sexually involved when they are not. This is a problem, especially in cross-sex (e.g. male-female) mentoring dyads.
3. Dependency - The protege can become overly dependent on his/her mentor. The mentor could leave an organization and leave the protege psychologically unprepared.
4. Unrealistic Expectations - The mystic of the fast track advancement that a mentoring relationship can offer may cause one or both members of a mentoring relationship to develop dangerously unrealistic expectations for what can be accomplished as a result of the new association. Shapiro writes "The search for a role model who uniquely represents the ideal, ... professional incarnate is destructive to both student (protege) and role model (mentor) alike, enmeshing the student in a hopeless search and the role model, in a prison of unattainable expectations" (Shapiro, et al.,

1978, p. 55). One person may not be able to provide for any proteges every developmental need.

5. Duration - A mentoring relationship lasts generally between three and six years (Kram, 1985, p. 116.) This may be too short a period for either or both people.

6. Not everyone wants to be involved - Not everyone wants to be mentored or to be a mentor. It is important to keep this in mind.

7. Lack of Availability - The lack of any key element in a mentoring relationship may keep interested individuals from connecting. In organizations which are designed hierarchically, there are fewer bosses than there are peers. Thus, there is a limited supply of potential mentors. Kram has also identified that a young professional may have a limited capacity to form enhancing relationships early in his/her career which permit the availability of mentoring opportunities(Kram, 1985, p. 623). Lastly, as Shapiro and Associates write, "Mentorships are not democratic" (1978, p.56).

The Need for Alternatives to Conventional Mentoring

Currently, there exists a wealth of recent literature illustrating the varied benefits of conventional mentoring relationships (Levinson, 1978; Kram, 1983, 1985; Shapiro, Haseltine, Rowe, 1978; Dalton, Thompson, Price, 1977). The question must be asked, are there other alternative types of relationships that could provide the same benefits? Beyond that point, are there alternative relationships which would have the benefits of conventional mentoring without many of this previously listed disadvantages?

Peer relationships appear to be one such alternative. There have been three primary works which have addressed this possibility: Shapiro, Haseltine, and Rowe, 1978; Kram, 1983; and Kram and Isabella, 1985.

Shapiro, Haseltine, and Rowe, 1978: Moving Up: Role Models, Mentors and the "Patron System"

Shapiro, et al., have developed a continuum of what they call "the patron system" (see Figure 1). The patron system involves variations of supportive relationships which differ in the degree of intensity.

At the left would be conventional mentoring. Shapiro defines "mentors as the most intense and paternalistic" on the continuum (p.55).

At the far right are what is labeled "Peer-pals". The peer-pal relationship differs from the conventional mentoring relationship in that each participant is both the mentor and protege. There is a mutual exchange between the peers, and depending on the circumstance, one will be the mentor and the other protege. This differs from conventional mentoring in that the flow of advice and support is usually one-way from the mentor to the protege. The concept of peers advising each other implies that the concept of the "older and wiser" mentor as Levinson describes, is no longer essential.

At face value, this appears to offer some merit. As technology continues to evolve and the spirit of entrepeneurship takes hold, an increasingly younger population have experiences that older members of society may not. The focus on age as an element of a mentor's wisdom may be waning. The new focus may be on issues of influence, accomplishments, and resources, rather than on age.

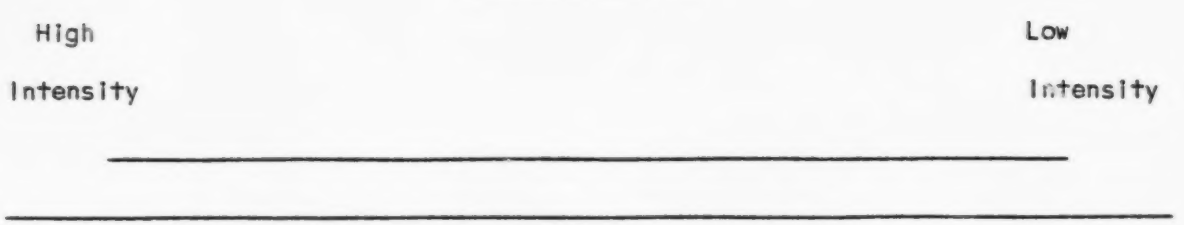
On benefits, Shapiro writes, "The reciprocity implicit in the relationship can provide a powerful boost toward success for each of the participants through sharing information and strategies and providing sounding boards and

advice for one another, peer-pals help each other while helping themselves" (p. 56).

At the center of the continuum are two points labeled "sponsors and guides". These individuals are able to provide less assistance and intensity of support than a conventional mentor, but still provide useful guidance and support.

Figure 1

The Patron System



Shapiro, Haseltine, and Rowe, 1978, p.55

Relationships which are closer to conventional mentoring, says Shapiro, are by design more "hierarchical, paternal, more intense and exclusionary, and more elitist" (p.56). Those that are closer to the peer-pals end of the continuum are more accessible, less intense and exclusionary, and more democratic.

Other Characteristics of "Peer-Pals":

- While mentors frequently introduce their proteges to established networks of people, peer-pals often create their own "new older" networks (p. 57).

- The young professional can take a much more active role in finding one of more peer-pals, and can accept more proteges than a conventional mentor can because the relationship is less intense, time consuming, and exclusionary (p. 57).

- Peer-pal relationships provide greater latitude than conventional mentor-protege dyads so that the relationship can be created or restructured to meet the needs of the participants (p. 57).

Kram, 1983: Phases of the Mentor Relationship

Kram concludes a study on the phases of conventional mentoring relationships with the following three observations:

1. "The wish to find one senior manager who will carry an individual through his/her career, and who will continue to be responsive to individual concerns is one that is likely to generate considerable disappointment and disillusionment."
2. "It would be fruitful, therefore, to investigate the patterns of relationships that individuals have of successive career stages in order to illuminate other developmental relationships as alternatives to the primary mentor relationship."
3. "Peer relationships appear to offer a valuable alternative to the mentor relationship; They can provide some career and psychosocial functions, they offer the opportunity for greater mutuality and sense of equality, and they are more available in numbers."

Kram and Isabella, 1985: Mentoring Alternatives: The Role of Peer Relationships in Career Development

Assuming the possibility of alternative developmental/support relationships, Kram and Isabella designed a study of 25 relationship pairs which indicated that relationships with peers offer alternatives to conventional mentoring relationships. Like Shapiro, et.al., Kram and Isabella have developed a continuum of support relationships. The continuum developed by Kram and Isabella specifically lists a range of peer relationships.

- "Peer relationships appear to have the potential to serve some of the same critical functions as mentoring, and appear more likely to be available to individuals.
- "The lack of the hierarchical dimension in a peer relationship might make it easier to achieve communications, mutual support, and collaboration, then it would be in a conventional mentoring relationship."

Their continuum was developed to analyze similarities in relationship pairs by studying these key elements:

1. Intensity of relationship
2. Level of commitment
3. Age - organizational level combination
4. Issues worked on
5. Needs satisfied

Using this method, Kram and Isabella have differentiated the developmental functions that conventional and peer relationships provide.

FIGURE 2

Developmental Functions-Comparison of Mentoring and Peer Relationships

Mentoring Relationships	Peer Relationships
Career-enhancing functions	Career-enhancing functions
. sponsorship	. information sharing
. coaching	. career strategizing
. exposure and visibility	. job-related feedback
. protection	
. challenging work assignments	
Psychosocial functions	Psychosocial functions
. acceptance and confirmation	. confirmation
. counseling	. emotional support
. role modeling	. personal feedback
. friendship	. friendship
Special attribute	Special attributes
. complimentarity	. mutuality

They conclude, "While many of these functions are similar to those characteristic of mentoring relationships, one special attribute makes them unique. Peer relationships offer a degree of mutuality that enable both individuals to experience being giver, as well as the receiver of these functions"(p. 116).

Within the contexts of these relationships, peers are able to provide confirmation to each other through sharing perceptions, values, and beliefs

related to their lives at work and through discovering important commonalities in their viewpoints. Secondly, peers can provide emotional support by listening and counseling each other during periods of transition and stress. Third, in discussing areas that extend beyond the specific job-related concerns addressed by career functions, peers offer each other a personal level of feedback that can be an invaluable aid to their (a) learning about their own leadership style, (b) learning how they affect others in the organization, (c) seeing how they are managing work and family commitments. Finally, peer relationships can provide friendship, encompassing concern for each other that extends beyond work itself to the total human being.

An additional benefit is that peer relationships can endure far longer than relationships with mentors. Whereas a mentoring relationship generally lasts between three and six years (Kram, 1983), some peer relationships seen in our study began in early career and continued through late career, lasting as long as 20 or 30 years.

Introduction of Co-mentoring Relationship

Recent studies on alternatives to the conventional mentoring relationship suggest that peer relationships offer an interesting and available alternative (Shapiro, Haseltine, & Rowe,1978 and Kram & Isabella, 1985). It has been established that a variety of developmental benefits can be initiated and obtained from peer relationships. It is important now to recognize that considerable variations in these types of relationships exist.

Individuals may choose to enter and remain in a peer relationship for a variety of reasons. Kram and Isabella in a recent study identify a continuum which addresses peer relationships (Kram & Isabella, 1985). Points on this continuum, illustrated in Figure 3, are characterized by a particular set of

developmental functions, a unique level of trust and self disclosure, and a particular context in which the relationship has evolved.

At the extreme left of the continuum are " information peers," whose primary function is information sharing. It reflects low levels of self-disclosure and trust. Infrequent contact and the focus on information exchange leaves little room for emotional support. Because such relationships demand little and appear to offer a number of benefits as a result of information-sharing, they will be the most common peer support relationship in an organization.

The middle of the continuum is a more intense relationship which Kram and Isabella refer to as" collegial peer." This relationship involves moderate levels of trust and self-disclosure. Information-sharing is joined by greater emotional support, feedback, confirmation, career strategizing and friendship. Due to the more extensive nature of this relationship which involves substantially greater time and commitment, individuals will engage in fewer of these relationships.

At the far right end of the continuum lies the" special peer" relationship. It is the most intense form of peer interaction where pretense and formal roles are replaced by great self-disclosure and self-expression. We have chosen this "special peer" relationship to become syncnymous with our proposed "co-mentoring" relationship. We have decided to refer to the relationship we propose as a "co-mentorship", rather than a "special peer" relationship for a number of reasons. First of all, the word "peer" implies that people within the relationship are at the same level, age or rank. The definition of "peer" offered in Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary is as follows; one that is of equal standing with another: belonging to the same group in society, especially

when membership is determined by age, rank, or status "(1974). We contend that it is unnecessary to restrict co-mentoring to interactions and relationships with those considered " peers." Our concept of co-mentoring is a mutual, intense mentoring relationship that is common among peers, but transcends age, rank, and organizational level boundaries. According to Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, the prefix "co" signifies "with, together, in conjunction, jointly"(1977, p.213). Therefore, although each participant in the co-mentor relationship may be at different ages and organizational levels, each has the opportunity to share in an intense relationship, and reap similar supportive benefits.

Additionally, the concept of co-mentoring mirrors the significant attributes of conventional mentoring relationships. Kram and Isabella do not identify the special peer relationship as a parallel to conventional mentoring relationships. The authors perceive a vital distinction between the limited perception of the special peer relationship and the actual mentoring functions this relationship indeed provides. Therefore we have renamed the "special peer" as " co-mentoring" to explicitly articulate the richness and potential of this relationship.

Kram and Isabella discuss characteristics of the "special peer" relationship, but do not offer a specific, working definition of the term. The characteristics discussed include confirmation, emotional support, personal feedback, and friendship.

FIGURE 3

A CONTINUUM OF PEER RELATIONSHIPS

Information Peer	Collegial Peer	Special Peer
Primary Function	Primary Function	Primary Function
Information-sharing	Career strategizing	Confirmation
	Job-related feedback	Emotional support
	Friendship	Personal feedback
		Friendship

Kram and Isabella, 1985, p. 119

ELEMENTS OF CO-MENTORING

When considering the relevance of a co-mentor relationship within an organization, three elements must be investigated: Communication, Circumstance and Chemistry. Analyzation of these three aspects will provide an individual with general indicators about the appropriateness of co-mentoring at both personal and organizational levels.

Communication

Communication is relevant in terms of personal leadership style and also of how individuals generally relate or interact within an organization. Giving and receiving information and feedback are an inherent part of any relationship. An individual must consider how s/he reacts to feedback and whether the reinforcement process will be a comfortable one. At the organizational level, formal and informal patterns of information dissemination can have an incredible impact upon effective communication. At any time, bottlenecks in the process could very well upset valuable access to communication and one's usefulness to a co-mentor relationship.

Although many of these aspects of communication are important to both conventional mentoring and co-mentoring relationships, one particular difference must be taken into account. The co-mentor relationship allows for each participant to experience being the giver as well as the receiver of all types of information, feedback, support, and constructive criticism. It is true that conventional mentoring relationships elicit some receiving of feedback on the part of the mentor. However, it is not as extensive as the neutral give-and-take of a co-mentor relationship. Thus, the communication patterns between co-mentors must be especially sensitive to maintenance tasks. These are the tasks which both individuals engage in to ensure that messages are being clearly understood and interpreted. If either personal communication styles or formal and informal communication within an organization do not lend themselves to the performance of maintenance tasks, a co-mentoring relationship may not be achievable.

Circumstance

Circumstances, or the environmental context in which a relationship exists, can strongly impact the success of the co-mentoring relationship. Environmental issues of any organization such as structure, conflict, or reward systems are considered part of the organizational culture. For the purposes of this paper, circumstances are synonymous with organizational culture.

Organizational Cultures' Influence on the Mentoring Relationship

An organization's culture conveys the traditions, values, customs, practices, and socialization processes that endure over long periods of time and influence the attitudes and behaviors of its members (Robbins, 1983, p. 451). These variables expressed through an organization's culture may have an influence on if, when, how, and with whom one will choose to pursue a mentoring relationship.

Because of the time commitment of developing such a relationship, it appears that examining the organizational culture will be beneficial in assessing its appropriateness and practicality. The type of mentoring relationship, be it conventional or co-mentoring, that has the highest chance of success may be determined by asking some questions about an organization's culture.

Five characteristics have been identified as consistently tapping the essence of an organization's culture (Campbell, et.al., 1970). These include individual autonomy, structure, reward orientation, consideration, and conflict.

Individual autonomy includes individual responsibility, independence, and opportunities for exercising individual initiative. Some questions perspective participants may ask themselves are:

- Will the development of this relationship be viewed as an inability to work alone?

- Do the values of this organization support interdependence and co-worker alliances?

- Will this be viewed as taking individual responsibility for development, or wasting a co-workers time?

Structure is the degree of organizational centralization, direct supervision and formalization. Questions to assess your organization's structure may include:

- How often do I interact with supervisory personnel?

- Is this interaction formal and very goal-oriented, or includes personal issues as well?

- Are there a limited number of upper level personnel available to select a mentor from, or are they plentiful?

This final question may indicate consideration of a co-mentor relationship more appropriate, due to a lack of available mentors.

Reward orientation is the third characteristic examining an organization's culture. This includes factors of reward, promotion-achievement orientation, and emphasis upon profits and sales. These are a few questions to ask in considering the reward orientation of an organization:

- Will I be rewarded or chastised for pursuing such a relationship?

- Will this more likely be beneficial or deleterious to my advancement in the organization?

- Is this organization so profit-motivated that this will be viewed as wasting valuable sales time?

Consideration, or the level of worth or support provided by superiors, will be important to assess in determining the appropriate type of mentor relationship.

Because the mentor-protege bond is such a special one, the relationship must of necessity be intense (Blotnick, 1984). This is also true of co-mentoring relationships. When the relationship is intense, it will be important to consider whether superiors will support or, at the least, tolerate it. In reviewing this point,some questions to consider include:

- Is your superior approachable and friendly, or distant and alienating?
- Do you perceive him/her as an advocate and sponsor, or a necessary encumbrance?
- Do the organizational values and activities support interactions between its members that transcend the mere day to day workings of the company?

Conflict is the final element of organizational culture to examine. This includes "the degree of conflict present in interpersonal relationships between peers, as well as the willingness to be honest and open about interpersonal differences" (Campbell, et.al., 1970). Recognize that moderate conflict can be productive to the relationship.

- Does there appear to be extreme strains on the relationships already present in your office?
- How free are people to discuss differences of opinion?
- Is it considered tabu to confront a peer or superior about points of disagreement?

This is not an exhaustive list of questions and issues to be raised when determining your choice of mentorship options. They are offered as examples of issues that may and should arise when determining the type of relationship that has the greatest opportunity of success under the given circumstances. The elements of organizational culture appear to be significant in determining the appropriateness of a mentoring relationship. Using the five characteristics discussed above as managerial tools will prove to be key indicators in the development of a successful mentoring or co-mentoring relationship.

Chemistry

Chemistry, for the purpose of this concept paper, shall be defined as an initial attraction and interest in wanting to work with another individual. The chemistry between individuals in a mentoring relationship is necessary for its initiation and ultimate success. Chemistry appears to be that underlying sense of trust and compatibility, or functioning, as of a complex of emotions" (American Heritage Dictionary, 1970), is a phenomenon not easily categorized but essential. Levinson's study of adult development (1978) describes mentoring as an intense form of "love". In that context, the presence of chemistry allows for the potential development of love. The author interprets "love" to mean a deep personal interest and concern for another.

The phenomenon of chemistry is especially important in exchanges between co-mentors. Initially, the degree to which the participants feel comfortable with each other will be a strong indicator of future compatibility. The co-mentor relationship demands a high degree of openness and vulnerability on the behalf of each individual. When the right chemistry doesn't exist, the relationship may be impossible to pursue. The co-mentors will not readily give

or receive feedback, provide emotional support, or open themselves up at any level beyond an exchange of information.

What the "right chemistry" is between different individuals is very personal and cannot easily be speculated about. The next section describes a seven-step co-mentoring model which will help an individual decide upon his/her expectations and desires from a co-mentor relationship. Based upon these expectations and personal intuition, the individual will best be able to decide whether or not the right chemistry exists with someone else. The key here is that one must be willing to risk the process of that discovery.

Establishing a Co-Mentor Relationship: A Seven-Step Model

Considering the intensity of a co-mentor relationship, it is obvious that many benefits can be achieved from engaging in such a relationship. It also requires the greatest personal investment and risk of any type of peer mentoring relationship. In this context, it is easy to see why successful co-mentoring may be rare and/or take several years to develop. Below, we offer a seven-step plan which will help to facilitate the establishment of a co-mentor relationship. These steps follow a similar model by Linda Phillips-Jones on mentor-protege relationships (1982, p. 188). The first three steps involve critical self-evaluation. They are essential to the assessment of whether or not co-mentoring is appropriate for an individual. These three steps will be shaped and influenced by individual style, experience, and personality, and should not be left out.

The model assumes that an individual will be starting from the beginning. They will have to establish the relationship, and more than likely enter it at an information-sharing stage. The full development into an intimate co-mentoring relationship can only be implied. That evolution is fully up to

the individuals involved in the relationship. As mentioned earlier, a co-mentoring relationship takes time. These seven steps merely provide a vehicle for full development later on.

STEP ONE: Values Clarification

The first step to building a co-mentor relationship is for one to decide why s/he wishes to embark upon such a relationship. Identification of underlying reasons and motivations provide an individual with insights about why s/he is moving in this direction at this time. It may be that a peer or co-mentor relationship is not appropriate at all. One must be clear about what the motives really are. Otherwise, the co-mentor that is chosen will probably receive mixed messages somewhere in the relationship.

STEP TWO: Analysis of Personal Contributions to the Relationship

Step two is analysis of what the initiator can provide to the other individual in a co-mentor relationship. Honest consideration of personal influence, skills, knowledge, or other contributions must take place. A prospective co-mentor must want something that the individual can provide or there would be no reason for the relationship. At this time, one must also identify, his or her own limitations and those things they are able to provide a co-mentor. This type of self-evaluation will help to set the parameters under which a successful co-mentoring relationship can exist.

STEP THREE: Analysis of Expectations

The third step encourages the individual to consider what they expect to gain from the relationship. One must set both personal and professional goals which are realistic and attainable. At this time, an individual should consider the degree to which s/he can handle and react constructively to criticism, suggestions, and both positive and negative feedback.

More than likely, the co-mentor relationship between two people will develop inherent psychological contracts: which comprise the expectations of each individual in terms of what they expect to give to the relationship and what they hope to get in return. These contracts have a great affect upon the dyads interaction and become a "powerful determiner of behavior" (Schein, 1980, p. 24). With this in mind, it is important for an individual to identify specific expectations and communicate them accurately to the co-mentor once s/he has been chosen and consented to participate.

STEP FOUR: Information-Gathering

Step four involves gathering information about prospective candidates. An individual must have already identified several people with whom they believe a co-mentor relationship would be desirable. A list should be developed which singles out potential candidates and what each may have to offer. Next, all information sources should be tapped: contact co-workers, supervisors and friends. This networking approach should include people from ones personal, acquaintance, and professional contacts. Attempt to determine what motivates potential candidates. One should also watch how each responds to reinforcement by others. Perhaps taking candidates out for a casual lunch may elicit valuable information. Try to determine what needs of each candidate might be met through this association.

STEP FIVE: Establishment of Guidelines For Selection

Step five is setting up a selection plan. This involves determination of guidelines and criteria to follow for effective decision making. At this point in the process, the characteristics of co-mentoring need review. These include the following: information-sharing, career strategizing, job-related feedback, emotional support, personal feedback, and friendship or the potential for it. We recognize that this will be a somewhat subjective decision based more on

intuition than anything else. The element of chemistry in the decision-making process will cause it to be somewhat subjective. However, a sound objective framework will be useful during the decision-making process. A simplified variation of cost-benefit analysis where the most important elements are weighted may be helpful.

STEP SIX: Choice of Co-Mentor

The sixth step is making the choice of a prospective co-mentor. Often, individuals choose someone who is similar to him/her simply because communication or leadership style appear to be compatible. This can be a good and valid justification for such a choice. However, candidates who have very different styles and ideas should not be immediately ruled out -- they can be a valuable source of new ideas and perspectives. In any case, the individual should decide upon someone s/he believes they can learn the most from and have the most to offer in return.

STEP SEVEN: Initiation of Relationship

The final step involves initiating the co-mentor relationship. Although the process will probably only start at the information-sharing stage, the concept of co-mentoring should be kept in mind and discussed. Because co-mentoring is a new concept, candidates may resist the idea at first. As a result, explanation of the possible benefits and procedures may be necessary for the candidate to understand what is being offered. The motives may be unclear to them. Persistence - to a point - could help. The individual may try selling what s/he has to offer. Communication style and the ability to express expectations are crucial at this time. If the prospective co-mentor believes it's a good idea, then it's time to set up some ground rules. Each individual may need to make compromises, if necessary, but not lose sight of the elements they wish to gain from the relationship.

STEP EIGHT: Kahauna Status Achieved

By following the seven steps outlined above, individuals begin to achieve the developmental advantages of a co-mentoring relationship. Personal commitment of time and effort will play a major role in the success of this dynamic and rewarding relationship. Considering the limits of some conventional mentoring associations, we feel that co-mentoring is an accessible and vital alternative to conventional mentoring.

Implications

Attention should be given to the fact that while many individuals who have participated in a mentoring relationship have achieved career and personal success, there does not appear to be any evidence that it is the only way to attain career success.

Research thus far has not shown a pure cause-effect relationship between any mentoring received by individuals and fast-track career success. There may be other causes. However,co-mentoring does appear to be a great resource for individuals who are seeking methods to advance their careers and develop personally. Due to the fact that this concept has only been investigated in one organizational setting, the generalizability of co-mentoring is undetermined at this time. Clearly, further research is necessary to determine the potential benefits to individuals and organizations. While it may not be appropriate for everyone, it does appear to be a developmental program many people choose to be involved in.

Additionally, the potential exists for co-mentoring to become a significant and worthwhile managerial tool in a variety of settings. This has the potential to assist in the initiation of new employees, enhance job

satisfaction, and reduce costly turnover. Research should be undertaken to investigate whether these potential benefits are achievable.

CONCLUSIONS

Co-mentoring has been proposed in this paper as an intense mutual mentoring relationship that is common among peers but transcends age, rank, and organizational-level boundaries. It can offer a valuable alternative to conventional mentoring relationships that are either unavailable or inappropriate for some individuals. Within the context of mutual interaction, co-mentoring relationships can provide the intense, on-going personal and professional support key to a successful mentoring relationship level.

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